



Northern Ireland
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Assembly and Executive Review Committee

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Women in Politics and the Northern Ireland
Assembly — Barriers and Challenges: Ms
Jane Morrice

7 October 2014

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Pat Sheehan (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Paula Bradley
Mr Gregory Campbell
Mr Paul Givan
Mr Trevor Lunn
Mr Raymond McCartney
Mr Seán Rogers
Ms Caitríona Ruane

Witnesses:

Ms Jane Morrice

The Deputy Chairperson: I give you a very warm welcome, Jane. I suppose it should be "welcome back". You have been here before in another lifetime as a Member of the Assembly. I invite you to give your presentation.

Ms Jane Morrice: Thank you very much, Chair. I am delighted to be here, and — you are absolutely right — to be back. This room had a big round table in it at the time, if I remember, which I was expecting to see, and there are all new faces since my day. Not much has changed, really. I am delighted to be here to talk about women in politics. I do not want to dwell on other issues in the political sphere, but I will start by saying that it is increasingly accepted that gender balance and peaceful politics are inextricably linked. That will be my starting point. It is perhaps something that we can debate in the Q&A session afterwards.

I am delighted that you have invited me and that you are looking into this issue so seriously. I know that you have done a lot of evidence gathering and you have been to Iceland and looked at Scandinavian countries and Rwanda and gathered evidence from experts and academics. I appreciate that you have come to me. I am not an academic and not an expert, but I suppose that I describe myself as an activist who cannot give up the fight. I also appreciate that I am not here in any specific role, so I am wearing no particular hat, but I can relate to my experience in a number of different fields, particularly as a representative of the Women's Coalition in the first Assembly and Deputy Speaker of the Assembly from 1998 to 2003.

I could classify the barriers and challenges to women's participation in politics into two categories, which are the soft and the hard — the female and the male, if you like — the psychological and sociological and the physical and concrete barriers. I want to give you examples from my experience

first of all. From that I think that the second category, which is the physical barriers, are easier to tackle than the psychological.

On the psychological barriers, I could dwell at length on the issues that we and all Assembly Members back then faced in those early days. The worst were the incessant attempts to demean, humiliate and treat with disdain. Lots of people remember it. Someone just mentioned to me on the way in how we were treated as female Assembly Members. However, interestingly enough, we were often told that it was not discrimination at all — that all politicians treated each other that way, so it was not discrimination. Daily, I was reminded, "This is politics, my dear". I have to say that I did not like it. Interestingly, I have heard informed sources say that it has changed, but it could be that attitudes seem to have changed on the surface and that there is different treatment, but I wonder if attitudes have actually changed in the body of the beast.

I want to put as my first challenge in this category the culture that creates a cold house for women, as you have heard before. It is not just in politics, but in any place. I do not like to generalise, but I have to: it is in any place that men got to first. That is big business, boardrooms, Parliament and even the golf course. The mentality that a woman's place is in the home still exists among men and women.

I looked up the Google dictionary definition of the word "woman", and I could not believe what I saw. One of the indents was:

"A female paid to clean someone's house and carry out ... domestic duties".

It also said that it can be a way of addressing a woman, and it used as an example, "don't be daft, woman". That is Google. That is modern-day stuff, and it is a stereotyping which sets very, very dangerous precedents. That is the culture, then the stereotyping.

The lack of confidence among women is also hugely important, particularly among women of the older variety, of which I count myself one, although I am not short on confidence. A lot of women do not believe their own self-worth. They suffer from a lack of self-esteem and self-respect, and that is often not discouraged by partners, fathers, brothers, sisters or friends. Women are not encouraged to challenge themselves, to take risks, to reach beyond their capabilities or to be ambitious. An ambitious woman is a pushy individual, where that is not the case for a man.

I am generalising again, but I believe that the two main problems here are that we live in a society where women are still not taken seriously and where too many women still do not take themselves seriously. It is changing, but not fast enough. We need to change both the male and the female mindset. As I said, I am always generalising.

The second category — the physical, concrete problems — are simpler to explain and, as I said, easier to overcome. They include family-friendly working conditions; job share; flexible working hours; improved accessible childcare; accommodation for caring responsibilities; looking after elderly relatives, as well as children; changing the mentality of the workplace; and work/life balance. You will have heard all of those many times in your evidence-gathering up to now. The solutions in that area are relatively simple, but they depend on one thing, which is, without question, political will and leadership from the top.

Let us look at politics. As far as I am concerned, things like voluntary quotas are a must, for starters. To say that voluntary quotas are a must but that they are voluntary is something we can discuss later. I think that they should be set by political parties at the selection stage and for the lists. Timelines and targets should be set by the Assembly itself, if that is possible. If they are not achieved, there should be sanctions and even the threat of mandatory quotas by a certain date, such as from one Assembly election to another, for example. I also believe that the Assembly can do more in the area of affirmative action. You know that the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 allows it to try to get a 50:50 balance for Committee Chairs, Speakers, positions on the Assembly Commission, business trusts, delegations and other bodies, for example — trying to encourage as close to 50:50 as possible. There should also be specific training for women Assembly Members, mentoring schemes for aspiring female politicians and capacity building. A take-your-daughter-to-work day was quite current back then, and people were eager to do that. I do not think that it happens any more, but maybe I am simply not aware of it. Awareness of all this is important. Publicity is hugely important to make sure that the outside world knows that the Assembly is going to do something on this. That would encourage more women to see that politics would be more accessible.

I have been reading over some of the suggestions that have been made to you about an Assembly gender action plan. That would be a very interesting one to come up with, with a package of measures that takes in all of the above and more — everything from the confidence building to the mentoring and the targets and timetables. I believe that that would be a very interesting thing to start. I know that you have a new Speaker — I was delighted to meet him this morning — who is coming into place, and it would be a very interesting new departure for the new Speaker to work on getting a closer gender balance in the Assembly.

Obviously, you have already looked at the wonderful examples of progressive legislation in other parts of the world. You have been to Iceland and I am just back from Finland where, interestingly enough, they have serious problems with getting women into the private sector. They have done so well in politics and the public sector, but they cannot get women onto boards in the private sector. Malta is a very interesting one to look at. I met the Minister of Social Affairs in Malta, and she was telling me that all childcare is free there for working parents of children from 0 to 3, and then there is after-school provision. That is a wonderful thing — obviously costly, but very interesting.

Another one is the example of the new European directive on quotas for women on boards, which is very controversial. At the moment, it has not gone through the Council of Ministers; it has gone through the Parliament and the committee stage. Under that, there must be a quota of 40% of non-executive directors of companies that have more than 250 workers by 2020. That is encouragement etc, but with the potential threat of making it mandatory if it has not been achieved by 2020. It has to go to the Council of Ministers. Who knows how easily it will get through that?

I will close down here, because you wanted 10 minutes, and I could talk at length about it, but I want to hear your questions.

The text could be made to be more imaginative here. The idea of job-sharing in politics is something that I have been interested in for a long time. I have been pushing this idea since the end of the 90s. A pilot project would be very interesting. What you are getting there is two for the price of one — two candidates on one ticket. It was attempted in Scotland in the second Scottish Parliament election, I think, and the Secretary of State for Scotland at the time said that if the candidates won he was not going to allow them to sit in the Scottish Parliament. We were all ready to fight it in Brussels if that was the case, but they did not win, so it did not happen. It was also tried in Denmark in the European elections but again, it did not work for other reasons.

So, why not in Northern Ireland? It would be a fascinating way to go. A Labour MP, John McDonnell, has put it forward as well, so it is out there and it is something that is interesting people more and more. It would certainly enable not just women to get more involved but people with disabilities or people who feel that they could not carry out what ends up, as you all know, to be a 12-hours-a-day-or-more job.

There are plenty of ideas, but I repeat that it has got to come from the top. Look at what has happened in Rwanda; I spoke to a Rwandan Member of Parliament, and she said that it was because the boss — the president — said that it was going to happen that it did happen. As I said, it may be something for the new Speaker, or it could be addressed at the level of parties who could and should at this stage be battling with each other to attract more women.

One senior politician asked me how to get more women into politics. I just said, "Tap them on the shoulder". Men might not need that tap because many men see politics as their rightful place, but most women do not see politics as their rightful place, or what they see, they do not like. I am generalising again, but that is the differentiation that we have to make; the tap on the shoulder needs to be quite encouraging and forceful and have supportive measures with it that will help these women not only get into politics, but stay in politics.

Thank you very much indeed.

The Deputy Chairperson: Thanks very much, Jane. Trevor.

Mr Lunn: Sorry, I did not think that I would be first. I will have to marshal my thoughts now.

Thanks very much for that, Jane. At the very start you said that you thought that gender balance leads to peaceful politics. In Iceland, where we have just returned from, we asked the committee chair who we met — I can never pronounce her name, but she was very forceful and excellent — if their gender balance led to non-confrontational politics. However, she was absolutely adamant that it did

not. The impression I got was that their politics was every bit as confrontational as ours, just on different issues, but that the women held their own. We know the record of very good representation there.

Secondly, you mentioned your own experience. I think that the words you used were "humiliating discrimination". Was that because you were women, or because you were the Women's Coalition and some kind of a challenge to the established order? I cannot help but think that, in recent times, we have tended to treat another new party in much the same way. That was not a women's party — I am thinking of NI21. What do you think? Was it because you were regarded by the establishment as an uppity group of women or was it because you were actually women? In other words, were the women who were already here and not members of the Women's Coalition treated in the same way?

Ms Morrice: Thank you very much, Trevor. I will answer your last point first. I think that you are right in that the response to the Women's Coalition was a combination of things. By the way, when I said that my experience was of humiliation and demeaning behaviour, the point about discrimination was that people were saying to me that I was not being discriminated against because that was how they treated each other, men and women. Back then, it was all about everyone putting down each other, so they argued that it was not intended specifically for us. That is a different point.

Was it because we were women or was it because we were the Women's Coalition? Both, obviously. We were a challenge to the norm back then, and people found it quite difficult to work out where we had come from and where we were going. It was a 10-year experiment. It was a project that started in 1996 and ended in 2006 and went some way to being a cog in the wheel that got the peace process moving, but only a small cog. There were an awful lot of other people much more heavily involved in that than we were.

Mr Lunn: Did you get a reaction from the women in other parties, rather than the men?

Ms Morrice: We got a reaction from both. It was not always an easy experience. I was the diplomat in the party, as you can tell. I believe that we held our own and helped move things forward, in spite of the fact that many people believed the contrary. You made a point about gender balance, peace politics and the Iceland experience. That is interesting, because it is absolutely the case that women are as confrontational as men when it comes to big issues that they want to defend. However, there is also a different way to do politics, and much more consensus building is needed in this House. I hate to generalise, but consensus building and trying to see the other side rather than confrontation politics is much more a woman's way. In Iceland, there is still confrontational politics, but they have plenty of women representatives. I assume that the representation there is 50:50 or close to it.

Mr Lunn: It is not far off it.

Ms Morrice: Women bring value added to the negotiating table through their ability to encourage consensus building.

Mr Lunn: Have you met Caitríona? *[Laughter.]*

The Deputy Chairperson: Are you finished, Trevor?

Mr Lunn: Yes, thank you.

Ms Ruane: I could comment on consensus building, but I am not going to, because I want to talk about the measures we can take. My starting point is that this is not a comfortable place for women. It is not about whether you are able for it — obviously, women are well able for the job in the Assembly — but about the way in which women are treated daily. I am well able to confront and take on the worst elements of misogyny and have done so, but I do not want to do that. I do not want to have to do that in the workplace. I should not have to do it, and nor should anyone else. If it happens in the workplace, it needs to be regulated, and, unfortunately, that does not happen here.

We have a problem, and it is recognised across all parties — I welcome that — that we do not have enough women and need to take measures to get more women. I like things such as quotas; I hear what you are saying about voluntary quotas, but I have listened to people tell us about the Icelandic experience, who said that, as long as it is voluntary, nothing really changes. Let us try it voluntarily, but eventually we will have to legislate or regulate. I would like us to have quotas immediately, but I

am willing to have discussions here. Maybe the starting point is voluntary quotas, and we could then move on to mandatory quotas.

In Wales and Iceland, we also heard that, although we have a gap in representation by women at the moment, any measures that are brought in are done so by gender. If a board does not have enough men on it, you look at how to get enough men. In Iceland, you cannot go below 40% of either gender. The Welsh Assembly's presiding officer made that interesting point.

Funnily enough, I agree with you on the gender action plan. I sit on the Assembly Commission, and it is carrying out a gender action plan, which we are looking at. I also take your point about the new Speaker. Indeed, before Willie Hay left, he wrote to this Committee to say that, following our visit to Wales, he wants to see how we can do more for women in politics.

In Iceland, the idea of a job share came up, and everyone's eyes lit up; we really should look at that. Obviously, it is a difficult new concept for the electorate, but it would certainly be interesting to look at.

I will throw out a few things that you may want to comment on. I love free childcare for working parents; that is fantastic. It needs to cover before school, at school and after school because that is where you can really start to see a difference. Every woman and man whom we met in Iceland extolled the virtues of the three-month parental leave and said that it made a significant difference. Women academics, feminists — everyone — said that it made a difference, because it is flexible and can be taken at different periods. It can be taken just after a child is born, at the transition to work, at the transition to preschool or whatever. They were some of the comments.

As you probably know, legislation has been brought in in the South on the number of candidates for local government elections. It is probably too early to say whether it is working, but you will know from your experience of being in a party that there is nothing like finances to make a political party move on issues. Are you aware of that in the South or, indeed, anywhere? If you are, what is your view on it?

Ms Morrice: I will take those questions in reverse order. On the subject of the South and local government elections, I should have mentioned that I am the chair of the equality and diversity group of the Local Government Staff Commission for Northern Ireland. It has an initiative on women in local councils, which I think you will have heard about it. It started in 2006 and has done a fantastic job. I came on board a bit later, so I cannot claim credit for it. It is certainly getting women into chief executive positions in the councils, as well as more women into politics. It has not worked as well in politics as it has in chief executive positions, but it is a very promising template for a gender action plan. Have a look at what they are doing in local councils; it is very good.

You also mentioned the job share idea. I suggest that you get your research unit to look at what is being done and how it could be rolled out, because it would be a very exciting new development. It could start to sell politics to a bigger crowd. I cannot remember the term that was used when it was suggested at Westminster, but I think that it was "bonkers". Think about a job share being bonkers. Back in the day, a couple of political people were holding down two if not three jobs. Was that stretching people? This is doing the absolute opposite and sharing it, so I think that it is very valuable.

Slamming down hard on mandatory quotas will not be passed; you will not get people to support that. Voluntary quotas, however, are a very good and healthy way to get competition between parties, as in, "We've got more than you". Voluntary quotas could work with financial incentives and a carrot and stick attitude, with the stick being mandatory quotas. There could be a threat or a reminder that, if people do not get to voluntary quotas, something more could be done.

I hope that that has answered all your points.

Ms Ruane: What about the legislation in the South?

Ms Morrice: Yes, is that —

Ms Ruane: Parties must have a certain percentage of women candidates for council elections, or the party loses some government funding.

Ms Morrice: That is the list system — the quota system — and it is legislated for. I think that it is fantastic. Let us see how it works and how and who would legislate for it here. Would it be you?

Ms Ruane: Have you any comment on parental leave? I think that Iceland has very high maternity leave. Was it three months for paternity leave?

The Assistant Committee Clerk: It is nine months altogether.

Ms Ruane: Sorry; my mistake. Three, three and —

Ms Morrice: I was about to say that I understood that that was there already, but it is men getting —

The Assistant Committee Clerk: It is three months for women, three months for men, three —

Ms Ruane: One or other partner can then take another three months.

Ms Morrice: I totally agree. Any sort of innovative legislation that allows much more flexibility on which parent has the care and responsibility is valuable. Someone told me that the value of this is that it refers to gender rather than just to women. As you said, it has to be a minimum of 40%, whether it is male or female. That is valuable for parental leave.

Mr Rogers: Thanks, Jane. You are very welcome.

You talked about culture and stereotyping, and until we have a system of parental leave whereby a father also has three months' leave, we will never build that into the culture. That is not only good for the family but good for the child and its development. My real point is that we should facilitate women in politics. I think that they have family-friendly sittings in Sweden. That does not seem to work out in Iceland because politicians leave home on a Monday and do not see their families again until maybe Saturday. Do you have any thoughts on family-friendly sittings?

Ms Morrice: Absolutely. I sat on the Committee on Procedures in the first Assembly, and we introduced family-friendly working hours then. I have not looked to see whether those have changed, but certainly the agreement was that you stopped at 6.00 pm. I think that it has changed so that sometimes the Assembly is allowed to sit longer if required, but the norm is that you stop at 6.00 pm. I understand that Scotland copied us, but maybe that is a mythology. Is it not the case that you have family-friendly working hours?

Mr Rogers: We do to some extent, but if you are travelling for two hours to get here, it is not so family-friendly.

Ms Morrice: I was very much involved in the proposal for timed sittings in the first Assembly, so you can blame me. At the time, people wanted a sitting to go on beyond 10.00 pm, 11.00 pm or 12.00 midnight, so a 6.00 pm cut-off was as far as we could go. That meant that a two-hour journey home was not as bad as it could have been. I think that a 4.00 pm cut-off or a 10.00 am start might be a bit difficult for you. I do not know what time your sittings are now.

Mr Rogers: In Sweden, to facilitate women, they talk about family-friendly sittings. Have they gone any further than that?

Ms Morrice: I do not know the times of the sittings in Sweden in particular. It would be hard to reduce further the 10.30 am to 6.00 pm period, which, as you said, accommodates men and women. In those early days, it was interesting that our male colleagues were just as keen as the women to get the Assembly sitting hours changed because of the two-hour journey home. I am just thinking on my feet, but you could try to have sittings over three days and reduce the times.

The Deputy Chairperson: The Committee Clerk has informed me that the Scottish Parliament looked at the idea of three morning plenary sittings, but that was rejected.

The Committee Clerk: The Committee on Procedures recently looked at the issue here. I cannot remember the details, but moving into the Scottish model of three mornings a week with a less heavy workload in the afternoons was not supported by the Committee on Procedures' deliberations.

Ms P Bradley: I agree. I sit on the Committee on Procedures, and that topic has come up. We looked at the demographics of Northern Ireland, travel distances and so on, which is one reason why we did not accept it.

Thank you, Jane. I remember you from when I was a young woman in my 20s watching the Women's Coalition, which is when I became more politically aware of my surroundings. I remember very well seeing how that all worked. You mentioned the media, PR and trying to make this a job that women feel that they can and should do. We have discussed that in Committee and in other forums, and I speak to an awful lot of women's groups. What women get PR-wise is disgraceful, such as the slants that are put on any successful female, not just female politicians. I follow a Twitter account, which tweeted about an article in 'The Guardian' yesterday that stated that successful women are aggressive. That is very much what people tend to think, even though it is totally wrong. We can hold our own — we know that we can and are more than happy to do so — but that does not mean that we are aggressive. PR and the media have a long way to go to make politics more open for females and make this the type of job that a female should do.

I definitely agree that we need the Assembly and the media to come on board and look at us for what we are talking about, not what we are wearing that day or how our hair is sitting. It does not have to follow that a female should be treated like that. Quite frankly, most of the men in the Building would not be treated in the way that some of the media treat the women.

I like the idea of an Assembly gender action plan and would be quite interested in teasing that out a bit further, because there is merit in it. I was certainly one of those women who received a tap on the shoulder. I did not see politics as my career, and it was not until I received the tap on the shoulder that I said, "Actually, you are right; I should do that".

In Iceland, we found out about the length of time that women stay in politics. The Parliament of Iceland found that men stay in politics for ever whereas women do not tend to do that. They come in, stay for one or two terms and leave politics. Do we need to look at something there? We want to get women involved and have more women in politics, but we want to keep them. Do you have any ideas on that?

Ms Morrice: I will take your points in reverse order. Women staying in politics is a very interesting issue, and I do not know whether it should necessarily be encouraged or discouraged. If that is the way women work it — doing one or two terms — maybe it is healthy to move on and let other people in. Maybe their male counterparts should be encouraged to do that to make room for new people. I am not suggesting that we put it in legislation that people can stay only for certain periods of time, but change is no bad thing. As a response off the top of my head, I would not go in the direction of trying to get a woman to stay in politics for life.

Ms P Bradley: Do you think that females do not see politics as a life career? I have had a few careers, but my mother had one career for 40 years. She would not have changed her career because that was the job that she loved. In any job I have done, I have been there because I enjoyed my job and did not want to leave it. Is that a reason?

Ms Morrice: You have hit the nail on the head: it is not as enjoyable for women as it is for men. As Caitríona Ruane said, it is not a nice experience. An awful lot of people ask me, "Did you enjoy your five years in the Assembly?", and I tell them that "enjoy" is definitely not the word that I would use. It was challenging, rewarding and historic — all that good stuff — but it was not enjoyable.

Ms P Bradley: Do men say the same thing but then just continue? I expect more out of life. I expect to be content and happy and to look forward to going to my job every day.

Ms Morrice: That comes back to the point that politics should be made a warmer house for women, not necessarily so that they can enjoy it but so that they can thrive and be encouraged to stay and not have a sour taste in their mouth every time they go home after coming across something that did not work for them. I am not being specific, but the overall package is not something that women can thrive in or relish. That is probably one of the main reasons why women do not stay that long. There should be new blood always, but there should also be a much more attractive environment for women to be in.

Let me address the point about the media, which is a very interesting one. If there is a gender action plan in the Assembly, it should be run in parallel with getting the media involved. I recently started an

initiative with a few people called Women Seen and Heard. We have not totally got it off the ground yet, but it is trying to get more women into the media. Often, if issues come up about women or Europe, the phone call is made to me and I am there. There are so many more female experts out there whose faces should be seen on the TV, whether it is in health, policing or any other area. The media need to be much more aware of calling women.

Female Assembly Members in the media is another interesting issue. We do not see as many female Assembly Members on the TV as we should. I do not know whether that is down to a party decision when it puts names forward or whether it is down to the women finding it difficult to offer themselves because of a fear that they will not toe the party line. I would be interested to know what parties do when it comes to putting women onto the TV as spokespeople.

Women fitting the male model is the other issue you mentioned. That is something that happens that has to be avoided. I always argue that women should not be afraid to wear pink. Look around and you will see the dark suits and the women copying their male counterparts. I think that women can get into politics and be themselves. They do not have to do the breakfast meetings if they have a child to take to school: they can say, "Sorry, can't do that breakfast meeting." In my day, I used to say, "I have a pressing prior engagement", and that engagement was with my son at the school gates or something like that. We have to hide that because it is frowned upon if you do childcare stuff, and that has to change too.

Mr McCartney: Thank you very much for your presentation. You said, with some agreement, that politics can be a cold place for women. In that case, we have to make it warmer. In essence, you are appealing to the people who have made it cold to make it warmer, and those people perhaps do not accept that it is cold.

It is about how you make the impact. Caitríona talked about mandatory quotas in parties, but even that in itself is not a guarantee, because in PR elections areas can be carved in a particular way that means that you have a big quota but do not deliver more of a particular group — women, in this instance — into the mainstream. If there was a single thing that, you believe, the Assembly should do to make this place warmer, what would it be? Sometimes, there can be five or six different things, but they all talk over one another and you end up in the same place repeating the need to change what needs changes. So, what is the one big thing that you would change?

Ms Morrice: Public pronouncements. That goes back to political will. If people at the top — whether it is the Speaker, party leaders or others — start talking about bringing more women on board and put out press statements and go on air to say that, that sends the message to the grass roots that this is turning into a warm house. I am surprised that that is my answer. I believe that you could try all your tweaking and your legislation — I believe that that has to come as well in a gender action plan — all of which would be in a package of change, but if public pronouncements are heard — I believe that this happened with the women in local councils — so that people think, "Oh, they care; they are going to do something about it" and recognise that if they apply for a job they might actually get it, that might change things. It is about people leading and publicly pronouncing it. There you are.

Mr McCartney: That is an excellent idea. Even when it comes to Committee Chairs, it becomes difficult to legislate that that should be whatever, because parties then make the decisions about who goes into Chairs. That is why I am saying that sometimes these things have to be nailed down and made practical so that we make meaningful change rather than just saying, "That would be a good idea." Public pronouncement is perhaps the first step, but we need to do something concrete.

Ms Morrice: Obviously, making things known by public pronouncement has to be followed up by moves. That is what I said in my presentation; it involves Committee Chairs and the Assembly Commission. There is a serious problem, because the small number of women that there are cannot be everywhere, which is very difficult in the life of this Assembly. It will be hard to get women into these positions this time, but next time around is an opportunity that should not be missed.

Mr Lunn: I wanted to ask you about the media side of things. The problem we seem to have — we can only speak for ourselves — is not so much that we do not put forward women in proportion to the amount of representation that they have, but that the media will not let us. Depending on what the issue is, the media is very insistent that, in our case, it has to be Anna Lo or Naomi Long. There is a range of issues but they will just not talk to the rest of us, to the point where, if we cannot produce the one they want to speak to, they will not ask us to produce anyone. That happens, and that is the first thing.

The point that I really wanted to make is this: you talked earlier about the mentality that pervades society here, which is that a woman's place is in the home. That is what we are trying to get over here. We can talk about plans and artificial means, quotas and gender action plans, family-friendly hours and all those things, but the reason why the Scandinavian experiences are constantly put up as being examples of good practice is the fact that their voting system is different. They operate a list system in such a way that they have to put man-woman, man-woman or else leave it woman-man, woman-man. I do not know whether it is mandatory or whether it is agreed in the parties, but it is interesting that the biggest party in Iceland does not operate that system and is quite proud of its female representation.

When we talk about voluntary quotas — Raymond touched on it — you can produce a quota with an appropriate percentage of women and still, if the people who run the parties are so inclined, they can manoeuvre the situation so that hardly any of them have a chance of winning a seat. I am not pointing at anybody, but that is a fact. This is the thing about male domination that we are trying to get over. Do you have any thoughts about that?

Ms Morrice: It is fascinating that you brought up the problem of the media looking only for the women to speak to them. I wonder whether it is the case with other parties. I am surprised and would be interested to know what other parties do if the media insist on a woman in particular. At a press conference or something like that, you may have noticed that some parties are very careful about making sure that there are women behind the person who is speaking or, in the other case, a man behind the person who is speaking. The optics are terribly important in this as well. I was going to talk about 'Hearts and Minds' but that programme is gone now. By the way, I have noticed that the media are still doing four or five men on a panel without a woman. I find it shocking that that is accepted nowadays. I think that the BBC now has a ruling on its game shows — those lads' game shows — whereby they now have to have a woman on, so there is one woman out of the eight people. However, we must definitely, in some way, impress upon the media that four men on a panel is no longer acceptable in this world. The media should hear that loud and clear, and that is back to our public pronouncement.

Political parties may say that they cannot control who the media want, but I would be very interested in what would happen if parties said, "You are not getting us unless we give you a woman." Let us see what they would say then. If parties cannot do it that way, the optics of women being on your panels, behind your speakers, in your press conferences and that sort of thing is a way round it.

I do not know the details of list systems and the zip procedure of men and women. It is very interesting that the main party in Iceland did not use that, but it has got there. However, it is a procedure that, once the ball starts rolling, becomes natural, and I think that that is the case in the Scandinavian countries. It is just the norm that women and men are equally represented. It is in their DNA. When I was in Finland, I thought that they ticked every box when it comes to everything, from equality to treatment of people. It is wonderful.

We have not even mentioned education. We must educate youngsters into moving out of the stereotypes. That is hugely important, and it is really done in the Scandinavian countries, which is valuable.

I do not know whether I have —

Mr Lunn: You have covered it.

Ms P Bradley: I just want to pick up on the point about Chairs and vice Chairs. Sometimes, in here, we beat ourselves up a little bit. We have two Committees that each have a female Chair and a female vice Chair: the Health Committee and the Environment Committee. So, there are good things happening. If we looked at all the positions — Chairs, vice Chairs, the Policing Board, the Commission — we would see that most of the women in the Chamber hold a position somewhere on one of those bodies. I think that we need to look at the positives as well, especially when you look at the Environment Committee and the Health Committee. Not that it should be seen as the exception: it should be the norm. However, there are good things as well, when you see that two of the Committees are led by women.

Ms Morrice: Back to the optics: this is interesting, because I wonder whether the public see that. It is just as important to let it be known and be seen outside, as it is for it to happen inside. That is just the additional thing. We must recognise the positive but shout about it louder.

Ms P Bradley: Maybe we, as women, are at fault for some of those things as well. We should be shouting louder.

Ms Ruane: I want to follow on, just briefly, from the points that Paula and Trevor made. What parties need to do is to put women in positions of authority and power. Some parties do that more than others. Most parties now realise that they need to be doing it. Still, looking right across the board, I do not think that we should pretend that things are better than they are, because they are not good. Yes, we have a couple of women Chairs and that is good, and we have some women Ministers and that is good. However, by and large, the power within political parties is still with males. That is what our problem is.

It is about who decides who goes on the media. The woman Chair of the Health Committee will be sent on to talk about health, but the other Chair of another Committee will be sent on to talk about politics or what is perceived as politics — the hard stuff. That is why you are seeing all-male panels.

My party has a pretty good record in relation to positions. We have three women Ministers and two or three women Chairs. I am the only woman Whip, and I am on the Assembly Commission. But it is still not good enough. We need to challenge ourselves. I challenge my party, and I know that other women have to challenge their parties, though I am not speaking for any other women. The power, the decision-making, the managerial positions — that is where the key decisions are made, and party leaders have such an important role and responsibility. Trevor said that the media are asking for the women, and they may be, but his party has two male Ministers, and they are in the media. I am not saying that as a criticism. I am just saying that I often see David Ford in the media, so it is not just female members of the Alliance Party who are in the media.

Mr Lunn: I am sorry to interrupt, but it is not that they always look for women. What I said was that there are issues that are perceived as women's issues. Let us take education: it could be about under-representation of males in primary-school teacher roles, so it is a woman/man sort of issue. They do not go for the education spokesperson; they go for a woman. That is not a good example, but on the sort of women's issues that I am talking about, the media has a history, certainly with us, of looking for specific people, and that may not be the spokesperson on that particular issue. The media do not care. When you point out that so-and-so does not speak for us on that, it does not matter because that is who they want. We get that a lot.

Ms Morrice: I was wondering about a women's caucus. We tried to have that in the original Assembly, and it did not work. For example, the United States brought a group of women Assembly Members to Washington, in the early days. Not all women Assembly Members went, but there was an attempt to get us to cooperate. It did not work. I wonder whether it could work now or whether it would be valuable. I did not mention it, but it would be very interesting to know.

Ms P Bradley: It is something that we have discussed. I chair the all-party group on UNSCR 1325, and we have looked at that to see how that could develop women in politics more. I do not know; as you said earlier, it is a different political climate now from what it was then. Our politics have matured — sometimes, you would not think so, but, generally, they have on the whole. I have spoken to the Assistant Assembly Clerk about looking at a women's caucus. I know that women's groups in the community are very interested in that as well. So, it could be something that we might have to —

Ms Morrice: It could be somewhere for women to go where they would be less intimidated by this sort of scene. A women's caucus could be part of the gender action plan; just one of the many ways of doing it.

Mr Campbell: I apologise for being late. I was held back because I was dealing with a female, gender-specific issue. Maybe it was a good thing that I was held back to deal with that.

You raised the issue of optics, Jane. I just wondered how important you think that this is. Prime Minister's Question Time is the occasion when the magnifying glass of the public is put on politics in the UK sense. In the spring of this year, there was one incident at Prime Minister's questions where the entire Conservative Front Bench was occupied by males, and the Labour leader drew attention to that. Every week since that, the Tories have ensured that there are at least two, three or four females

on the Front Bench. I do not know whether you are aware of that, but, to some of us, it looked as though it was a Conservative embarrassment reaction to what was a very good point made by Miliband. If that is the case, what do you think of that as a tactic?

Ms Morrice: Well, that is the name-and-shame type of approach. To go back to the point that I made about public pronouncements, your public pronouncements can be the positive ones — "Look, we have six women Chairs of our Assembly Committees. Isn't that brilliant?" — or the name-and-shame approach, which is to say, "We do not have enough Committee Chairs who are women". There are two ways to approach it, and both are valid, because —

Mr Campbell: Sorry, just on the optics, which is what I was getting at, given that television news seems to cover Prime Minister's Question Time more than some of the debates — it is the same here — it is not so much about what is being said by others, because it is the Prime Minister and the leader of the Opposition duelling, but that the visual image on one day was that there was not a single female. The Labour Party maximised the embarrassment of the Tory Party, to the effect that, every week since, they have been sure that there have been a number of females. Do you think that was a good idea or counterproductive?

Ms Morrice: It is a very good idea. It is tactical, and you could argue that it is tokenism, but it is very good for people to see women in politics backing up the Prime Minister at Prime Minister's Question Time, being interested, listening to what is being said and being involved. I think that, for the optics, we should see a mixture of men and women in politics on screen at a time.

The Deputy Chairperson: Thanks very much, Jane. That was a very interesting hour, which passed very quickly. Thanks for coming. It was a very useful contribution.